

CHAPTER VIII  
ABHINAVAGUPTA'S POLYMATHY

In a note on 'The Nāṭya Śāstra and the Abhinavabhāratī in the *IHQ.*, X. 1, March, 34, Mr. Manomohan Ghosh proposes to discuss the 'principles connected with the interpretation' of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (*N.Ś.*) and the chief object of the note seems to be to prove Abhinavagupta's nescience. The note has to be understood with reference to its etiology and it appears close upon a discussion on the architecture of the theatre described by Bharata in Chapter II of his *N. Ś.* in the previous numbers of the *IHQ.* in which Mr. Mankad, Mr. M. Ghosh, and myself took part. It is with reference to that discussion that Mr. Ghosh says in a footnote on p. 161 of this note that Mr. Mankad and Mr. Raghavan have given undue weight to the *Abhinavabhāratī* (*Abhi. Bhā.*). A perusal of the studies of mine on some subjects of the *N. Ś.* and the *Abhi. Bhā.* published in the *J. O. R.* Madras will show how I have not been a blind Bhakta of Abhinavagupta, how I have often gone to the very text of the *N. Ś.* and not only that, how I have pointed out that Bharata's text itself has often to be quietly laid aside. Regarding the particular subject of Theatre-architecture, I have said only this much, that Abhinavagupta cannot be totally neglected, that at least to one who wants to consult Abhinavagupta it is plain that Raṅga-śīrṣa and Raṅga-pīṭha are two different places and the measurements of the various parts of the play-house in our interpretation differ from those of Mr. Ghosh. It cannot be said that our interpretation is not borne out by the text of the

*N. S.* itself and with our interpretation which satisfies us, we find that Abhinavagupta agrees.

In the Note under discussion, Mr. M. Ghosh has expanded the issue to one of a general challenging of Abhinavagupta's polymathy or of 'Abhinavagupta's omniscience' as he says. He quotes a passage from the *Abhi. Bhā.* where on the subject of Prākṛt grammar, Abhinavagupta refers us for further knowledge to such Prākṛt grammar works as *Prākṛtadīpikā*, the *Vṛtti* on the *Prākṛtasūtras* by Utpala and the work called *Paddhati*. Basing himself on this passage, Mr. Ghosh says that Abhinavagupta "was not very well informed about Prākṛt Grammars and Grammarians". The reason given for this conclusion is that Abhinavagupta has not mentioned the known authorities, Vararuci, Bhāmaha and Caṇḍa, but has mentioned 'unknown' writers. This, after all, is negative evidence and it is too much to jump from this to the conclusion that "*any faith in Abhinava's omniscience will have to be given up.*" None has blindly taken Abhinavagupta as 'Sarvajña' but it would seem that Mr. Ghosh asks us to take Abhinavagupta as an 'Ajña' and not to worry ourselves over the text of his commentary, and waste time in reading it. For, he says that, to add to the inherent unreliability of the *Abhi. Bhā.* its text is in a wretched condition and that a critical edition of the *Abhi. Bhā.* is well nigh an impossibility, for a long time. This remark applies equally to the "wretched conditions of materials" regarding the text of the *N. S.* itself which alone Mr. Ghosh proposes to rely upon and study. At best Mr. Ghosh has argued only for the need for strenuous, careful, devoted and patient research in Nāṭya Literature.



To return to Abhinavagupta's alleged lack of information on Prākṛt Grammars, the evidence cited by Mr. Ghosh may be compared to Bāṇa's omission to praise Vālmīki and his epic in the introductory stanzas of his *Harṣacarita*. That Vararuci, Bhāmaha and Caṇḍa are the only universal authorities who exhaust the field, that a work called *Prākṛtadīpikā*, a Prākṛta Grammarian named Utpala and his *Sūtra Vṛtti*, and another Prākṛt Grammar called *Paddhati* are insignificant works and that Abhinavagupta's omission to refer to the former set of writers and his reference to the latter, argues his ignorance of Prākṛt Grammar Literature is to say too much. To Abhinavagupta are due our thanks for enriching our information on Prākṛt Grammar Literature. On the subject of Prosody, Abhinavagupta has quoted Jayadeva and Kātyāyana and not Piṅgala. Jayadeva at least is referred to twice by Namisādhu and his work is available and has more usually been printed. The quotation from a Kātyāyana's treatise on Prosody is a pure gain to our knowledge of Prosody Literature.

In the first paragraph of his Note, Mr. Ghosh has been least anxious to examine the Ms. of the *Abhi. Bhā.* before he passes his judgment that Abhinavagupta's commentary is an "one-sided version". Mr. Ghosh says: "This commentator (Abhinava), as was very natural for a scholar in those days, followed the recension of the work that was available to him and *probably did not know that there might be other recensions of the same*. As a result of this, Abhinavagupta's commentary loses much of its value". ( P. 161 ).

Now, there is concrete evidence to prove that Abhinavagupta knew the two chief recensions of the

N. Ś. In his *Abhi. Bhā.* itself, there are three places where Abhinavagupta himself says that another recension exists. This has already been pointed out by me more than once, in my exposition of the concept of Lakṣaṇa<sup>1</sup> and 'Writers quoted in the *Abhi. Bhā.*' published in the *J.O.R.*, Madras. It is well known that on Lakṣaṇas, the N.Ś. has two recensions, the Anuṣṭubh and the Upajāti recensions as I have called them in my exposition of Lakṣaṇa. Abhinavagupta here notices the existence of two 'Pāṭhakramas', of other Mss. containing a different set of Lakṣaṇas, and says that he chooses for the main exposition the recension handed down to him by his teacher and that then and there he notes the Lakṣaṇas of the other Pustakas also and explains them. He says :

“तथा च मतान्तरेण भरतमुनिरेव अन्यथाप्युद्देश(शेन) लक्षणेन च नामान्तरैरपि लक्षणान्तरैरपि च व्यवहारं करोति । तत एव पुस्तकेषु भेदो दृश्यते, तं च दर्शयिष्यामः । एरितो- ( प्रथमो ? )द्देशक्रमस्तु अस्मदुपाध्यायपरम्परागतः ।”

*Abhi. Bhā.* Mad. Ms., Vol. II. p. 384; G.O.S. II. p. 298.

Similarly at the beginning of the chapter on metres ( chap. XV ), Abhinavagupta speaks of the prevalence of two recensions. He says :—

“तत्रेहाध्याये भरतमुनिस्त्रिकैर्मकारादिभिः (?) कैश्चित् किञ्चिल्लक्षणं स्वीकृतम् इति द्विविधः पुस्तकपाठो दृश्यते । मध्ये च चिन्तनाय(चिरन्तन ?)पुस्तकेषु उभयमपि पठ्यत इति, एतन्नाम्ना एतत्प्रसिद्ध्या आत्मशास्त्रि(खा) श्लाघनीयेत्यर्थः ।”

*Abhi. Bhā.* Mad. Ms., Vol. II, p. 374; G.O.S. II. pp. 252-3.

1. See Ch. I. in my 'Some Concepts of Alaṅkāra Śāstra', Adyar Library.